

Dame Meg Hiller MP

Chair, Public Accounts Committee

House of Commons

5 October 2023

Dear Dame Meg,

We look forward to attending the Committee's evidence session on 19 October 2023 to give evidence on the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster and welcome the Committee's on-going scrutiny of this important programme.

I understand that my predecessor as Clerk of the House previously provided the Committee with information on asbestos, stone masonry falls, and fire incidents from 1 January 2016 to 29 March 2022¹, and from 29 March 2022 to 22 December 2022², which the Committee published on its website.

Given the Committee's interest in and previous requests for this information, I thought it would be useful for the Committee to receive a further update ahead of the evidence session on:

- asbestos related incidents
- fire incidents
- stone masonry falls
- Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

The list below only includes information on incidents since 22 December 2022, when the Committee was last updated. Information is given in the same format as previous correspondence on this matter.

In addition to the updated information below, the Committee should be aware that we are undertaking a detailed investigation into the potential presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) on the Parliamentary Estate.

Quantities of RAAC have been identified in at least two areas of the Palace (T Block and the River Range) and we continue to investigate other locations. The advice from our structural engineers is that there is no immediate risk based on the information we have to date. Further survey work is due to take place, and we would be happy to update the Committee further on this at the evidence session on 19 October.

There have been three Asbestos related incidents:

Date	Location	Incident	Action
February 2023	Norman Shaw North (Construction site under the control of the Principal	During controlled asbestos removal works, falling object caused minor perforation to	- Works stopped immediately, and adjacent area restricted.

¹ committees.parliament.uk/publications/9536/documents/161850/default/

² committees.parliament.uk/publications/33534/documents/182437/default/ followed by committees.parliament.uk/publications/33835/documents/184778/default/



	Contractor, with no interface with any House staff or teams)	enclosure. No disturbance or personal exposure, so incident did not meet reporting criteria defined within the RIDDOR Regulations ³ .	- Enclosure repaired prior to work recommencing.
April 2023	Norman Shaw North (Construction site under the control of the Principal Contractor, with no interface with any House staff or teams)	Unexpected Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) identified during controlled demolition works. No exposure, so incident did not meet reporting criteria defined within RIDDOR Regulations.	- Works stopped immediately, area restricted and measures implemented to contain potential spread of fibres. - ACM removed under controlled conditions. - Asbestos register updated and review of project information undertaken.
April 2023	Norman Shaw North (Construction site under the control of the Principal Contractor, with no interface with any House staff or teams)	ACM material fell from pipework during controlled soft strip demolition works. No exposure, so incident did not meet reporting criteria defined within RIDDOR Regulations.	- Works stopped immediately, area restricted and measures implemented to contain potential spread of fibres. - ACM removed under controlled conditions. - Asbestos register updated and review of project information undertaken. - Enhanced training of all site operatives. - Additional containment equipment procured. - Key lessons learnt shared in construction safety forum.

Fire:

Date	Location	Incident	Action
January 2023	Palace of Westminster	Food left unattended in microwave oven	- Burnt food removed and Microwave condemned due to fire damage.
March 2023	Palace of Westminster	Seized rotary fan over heated	- Power isolated to fan and duty left with Engineers Control.

³ Within the Reporting of Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013, exposure to asbestos is reportable when a work activity causes the accidental release or escape of asbestos fibres into the air in a quantity sufficient to cause damage to the health of any person.



April 2023	Palace of Westminster	Impact of dropped audio guide caused the rechargeable battery to ignite	- Damaged battery condemned and other batteries inspected for end of use date. - Audio guide batteries replaced with newer ones. - Safety alert published on Intranet.
May 2023	Norman Shaw North	Electrical fire in external utilities manhole	- Electrical fire as a result of a failed component used in the temporary electrical supply connection. - Fire burnt out before arrival of Fire Team. - Duty left with Utilities provider to rectify connection fault.

Stone masonry fall

Date	Location	Incident	Action
February 2023	Dartmouth Street	Small section of detached render from cornice found by main entrance.	- Mobile Elevated Working Platform ('Cherry Picker') inspected cornice of 21 Dartmouth Street and main façade of 14 Tothill Street. - Loose material removed.
August 2023	Palace of Westminster	Small fragments of stonework found on steps leading to Central Lobby from St Stephens Hall.	- Leaking pump in ceiling void above fixed. - Scaffold erected to inspect stonework ceiling and manage risk. - Ceiling drying out and regularly inspected.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Goldsmith
Clerk, House of Commons

Andy Helliwell
Chief Operating Officer, House of Lords